

**Soldiers** *Online*



# Welcome

Story by Steve Harding

**L**TC Tom Lasser jokingly calls the Joint Forces Training Base at Los Alamitos, Calif., a “military oasis,” but it’s an apt description. Surrounded by the urban sprawl and 12 million inhabitants of the Los Angeles basin, the 1,400-acre installation packs a lot into a relatively small area. Within its eight miles of perimeter fencing are more than 160 buildings encompassing about 1.5 million square feet of space. More than 45 tenant organizations call the small post home, and on any given day some 700 people — military, civilian employees and contractors — work at JFTB Los Alamitos. If they mobilized all the reserve-component units assigned to the installation, some 5,000 people — military and civilian — would report for duty. And, perhaps most important, Los Alamitos is home to the sole remaining military airfield in the greater Los Angeles and Orange County area.

*(continued on page 6)*

LOS ALAMITOS AIR  
TWR 123



# to Los AI



Saúl C. Park

*(Main photo)* Though perhaps best known for its airfield, JTFB Los Alamitos is home to some 45 tenant units. *(Inset)* Virtually every type of U.S. military aircraft — including Air Force One and Two — has passed through Los Alamitos Army Airfield.

ARMY AIRFIELD  
3.85



*Los Alamitos is home to the California National Guard's  
40th Infantry Division, and to the Army Reserve's  
63rd Regional Support Command.*

## A Little Bit of Everything

Opened during World War II as a naval air station, JTFB Los Alamitos became Army property — licensed to the California National Guard for operations, maintenance and management — in 1973. Commanding the base for California's State Military Department is BG Guido Portante Jr., who oversees the installation's extensive infrastructure, civic interaction and environmental compliance, as well as coordination of the base's diverse tenants.

Most of Los Alamitos' tenant organizations are military, and most of those are Army. These include an active-duty military intelligence company and elements of a training

support battalion, as well as the headquarters and several units of the California Guard's 40th Infantry Division — the largest single Army maneuver formation west of the Rocky Mountains. JTFB Los Alamitos also boasts the airfield, a 200,000-gallon fuel farm, extensive storage areas for military vehicles, and a state-of-the-art UH-1 helicopter simulator complex used by aviators from throughout the western United States and Pacific basin. The National Guard's Civil Support Team 9, a 24-member weapons-of-mass-destruction team, also calls the base home.

The Army Reserve is also well represented. The installation is home to the 63rd Regional Support Command and such other units as a psychological

operations company, a quartermaster company and a maintenance battalion. A detachment of Navy Reserve Seabees and two Marine Corps units — an infantry company and staff of instructors and inspectors — also are assigned to the JTFB.

Among the installation's five nonmilitary tenants are the state's Mediterranean Fruit Fly Eradication Program and California's Southern Region Office of Emergency Services. The latter agency is responsible for controlling all state emergency-relief efforts in Southern California, and it's no coincidence that JTFB Los Alamitos is a designated assembly area and air-movements center for disaster-relief operations.

"There are only two such centers in

JTFB TASC



Air Force C-17 and C-141 transports share the Los Alamitos ramp with California National Guard UH-1 and AH-1 helicopters. The 1.4 million-square-foot parking area is especially valuable given the far more crowded conditions at surrounding civilian airports.

the state,” said Lasser, commander of Los Alamitos Army Airfield, “here, and at Travis Air Force Base near San Francisco. The Office of Emergency Services has a 24-member staff and operates 24 hours a day.”

The JFTB has performed its military-support role several times, most notably during the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. In 1992 the installation was the arrival and assembly area for law enforcement, National Guard and active-Army personnel involved in quelling the widespread rioting in Los Angeles. The 1994 Northridge earthquake also brought local, state and federal disaster-relief agencies to Los Alamitos, and the base was a staging area for agencies mobilized during the 2000 Democratic national convention.

## The Biggest Little Airfield

Though home to a range of organizations, JFTB Los Alamitos is perhaps best known for its airfield.

“This is the largest Army airfield operated by the National Guard Bureau,” said Lasser. “Our two all-weather runways are capable of accommodating all U.S. military aircraft except the B-2 and B-52 bombers.

“And at one time or another we’ve had virtually every type come through here,” he added. “That includes everything from F-18 fighters to Air Force One. We can accommodate up to 12 C-5 airlifters on our 1.4 million-square-foot main parking ramp, and we can park additional aircraft on our



Steve Harding

**Inside the Los Alamitos tower, air traffic controller James Reasoner monitors local aircraft movements. The tower is one of the busiest in both the state and DOD.**

inactive third runway. That’s a significant capability, especially given the crowded conditions at local civil airports, and it makes Los Alamitos look more like an Air Force base than the typical Army airfield.”

The field has its own permanent residents as well — California Army Guard UH-1, AH-1 and UH-60 helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft participating in the Mediterranean fruit fly spraying effort and three Army Reserve C-12 utility transports.

“Every day is different,” said MAJ Myles T. Williams, the airfield’s operations officer. “One day we might have a dozen F-18s coming and going, the next day the president of the United States might land here, and the day after that a movie might be filming on the ramp. There is always something new going on. It’s challenging and fun and occasionally frustrating, but it’s a great place to work.”

## A Crowded Piece of Sky

The more than 1,100 flights that

arrive or depart from Los Alamitos AAF every month, combined with the incredibly crowded airspace over Southern California, mean that the field’s control tower is one of the busiest both in the state and in the Department of Defense.

At any given moment there are scores of airliners and smaller commuter planes landing at or taking off from nearby Los Angeles International, Long Beach, John Wayne and Fullerton airports, as well as fixed-wing civil and military aircraft transiting the airspace near the base. Add to that military, police, fire department and TV news helicopters — not to mention the occasional blimp — and you have a very crowded piece of sky.

“It can get a little busy,” said James Reasoner, one of two air traffic controllers on duty in Los Alamitos’ tower during **Soldiers’** visit. “Though our main job is handling the variety of military and civilian aircraft that use the base itself, we also handle commercial traffic in the immediate area.”

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different types of aircraft that may be in the area at the same time,” said Nancy Qasem, the other on-duty controller. “We may be working different types of aircraft with different airspeeds. For example, we may be working a slow helicopter and an inbound F-18 at the same time, and their speeds differ so much that it takes a little more concentration to do the job.

“But the most challenging thing for me,” Qasem said, “is the noise restrictions in place here. Military airfields are usually surrounded by big open areas, but here you have houses that come right up to the fence next to the runway. So when an aircraft departs, we direct it over the freeway or out over the industrial parks. But with aircraft of all sizes and types coming in here, there is definitely some noise.”

## Good Neighbors

Surrounded as it is by the Orange County communities of Los Alamitos, Rossmore, Seal Beach and Cypress, the JFTB cannot avoid disturbing some of its neighbors.

“When this installation was established during World War II it was in the middle of open farmland,” Lasser said. “We haven’t expanded, but over the years the cities around us have —



Los Alamitos’ state-of-the-art UH-1 helicopter simulator is used by pilots from military and government organizations throughout the western United States and Pacific basin.

right up to the perimeter fences. So we do everything we can — consistent with safety and mission requirements — to mitigate the noise. It’s all part of trying to be a good neighbor.”

The JFTB also makes an effort to reach out to the surrounding civilian communities, Lasser said. Not only is the installation home to a Civil Air Patrol squadron, it also hosts periodic open houses, Fourth of July fireworks, 5- and 10-kilometer community fun runs and other events.

Portante encourages collaborations among the base, its tenants and the local communities. One of the most prominent links between the JFTB and the greater civilian community is

centered on the installation’s Olympic-size outdoor swimming pool. Once sliding slowly into disrepair because of scarce maintenance funds, the pool is now the focal point of a collaborative effort among the base, the city of Los Alamitos and USA Water Polo. It is the centerpiece of a major aquatic training center and home to the U.S. national water polo team.

“Our military personnel and base employees use the pool for recreation, and our units use it for water-survival training,” Portante said. “The U.S. women’s Olympic water polo team trained here before going on to win the Silver Medal at the Sydney Olympics, and the pool was the site of last summer’s men’s and women’s water polo championships. It’s really a great deal for everyone involved.”

## Still to Come

And what does the future hold for Joint Forces Training Base Los Alamitos? Given the installation’s key role in both state and national operations, the coming years will be both busy and challenging.

“We have a lot to offer here — key facilities, well-trained and highly motivated personnel, and a great location,” Portante said. “Construction is under way on a multimillion-dollar joint headquarters building for the 40th Inf. Div. and 63rd RSC, and in the coming year we’ll welcome a Close Combat Tactical Trainer. And a state-of-the-art Training Simulations Center now under development will be able to train company- through division-level staffs. All in all, I think this ‘military oasis’ of ours will be here, doing the job, for many years to come.” □



California Army Guard aviators plan a mission. Los Alamitos is home to Guard UH-1s, AH-1s and UH-60s, as well as to Army Reserve C-12s.